

Cespedes, Christopher

From: Council of the Commons
Sent: Friday, March 31, 2023 2:15 PM
To: Cespedes, Christopher
Subject: FW: Center of the City (The Commons)

From: Cespedes, Christopher <xxxxxxx@a2gov.org>
Sent: Thursday, March 9, 2023 12:36 PM
To: Daniel Rubenstein <xxxxxxx@chinaint.net>
Cc: Council of the Commons <xxxxxxx@a2gov.org>
Subject: RE: Center of the City (The Commons)

Good afternoon Daniel,

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on last week's Council of the Commons (CotC) meeting. I appreciate your feedback and while I cannot speak to the specific plans and decision-making processes of the CotC, I can confirm that concerns will be provided as a communication item on the [April 6th Commission Agenda](#).

Thank you again for sharing your thoughts, and I hope that the CotC will consider your recommendations.

Best regards,

Christopher Cespedes, Management Assistant

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From: Daniel Rubenstein <xxxxxxx@chinaint.net>
Sent: Thursday, March 9, 2023 10:04 AM
To: Cespedes, Christopher <xxxxxxx@a2gov.org>
Subject: Fwd: Center of the City (The Commons)

You don't often get email from dan.rubenstein@chinaint.net. [Learn why this is important](#)

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Dear Mr. Cespedes,

I have been told that the email address for the Council of the Commons is not an actual group email, but that emails go to an administrator who then forwards them to the entire Council. Can you confirm if that is true and if you are now that administrator?

Also, can you please advise how to ensure these comments become part of an official record, be it minutes of a meeting or some other way. If by sending them as I did below they will become part of the record of the next meeting, please just let me know.

Thanks in advance,

Daniel Rubenstein

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Daniel Rubenstein <xxxxxx@chinaint.net>

Date: Thu, Mar 9, 2023 at 9:56 AM

Subject: Fwd: Center of the City (The Commons)

To: <xxxxxx@a2gov.org>

Dear Council of the Commons,

I just wanted to provide some thoughts on last week's Council of the Commons (CotC) meeting. I want to echo the sentiments of several commenters that I am heartened by the progress made with this latest set of well-thought-out recommendations. Good work and thank you.

That said, certain misunderstandings seem to persist. First, there is a narrative that such an endeavor must be largely if not exclusively privately funded. The presentation by the Downtown Detroit Partnership (DDP) should not be misunderstood. Yes, to date, Campus Martius has been privately funded, but (1) The city devotes, and does not begrudge, staff time, and, crucially, (2) DDP parks, including Campus Martius, are in Detroit's equivalent to the PROS plan, which enabled the recent \$13M+ grant the speaker mentioned. That grant, from the Michigan Strategic Fund, includes money for Campus Martius and its connectors. It is double the annual operating budget of the entire DDP. Public money -- including from DDAs -- is common and vital in urban parks; I'm sure Rita's and Frank's research can corroborate this. But the collaborative groundwork with the city has to be laid properly. Campus Martius is in Detroit's PROS plan.

The PROS plan ship has sailed. I urged the CotC to recommend for the Library Lot to be added. That suggestion was rejected. Next, CotC will have a chance to recommend at least inclusion in A2's Comprehensive Plan (CP). I hope it will do so. I believe it should be added before the next revision, still years away, via a new element, but it should be added. I appreciate the difficult political landscape -- that some will vehemently oppose this in public meetings -- but I hope the CotC will fulfill its purpose, i.e., to make recommendations on funding needs and operations, which leads to...

Second, "funding needs" doesn't just mean dollar amounts; it means strategies that facilitate funding and fundraising. When rejecting putting the Library Lot in the PROS plan, several people averred that being omitted would not "prevent" any actions, including funding. As the Detroit example shows, that is not true; being outside Detroit's PROS plan equivalent would have prevented Campus Martius from being funded through that MSF grant. But, more importantly, I hope the CotC's goal is not to "not prevent" things, but to make things happen. Some may wonder why being in the CP would help. It plays two crucial roles: (1) In city budget discussions, it gives the Commons equitable status relative to other priorities. Since the Commons is not eligible for Parks money, those budget discussions are its only chance for non-ad-hoc city funding. It should not be disadvantaged. (2) In external fundraising, it signals to potential donors a strong public-private partnership and, with it, long-term viability. I have heard potential donors have hesitated due precisely to the lack of such long-term partnership, not knowing if the city will support this moving forward. I would challenge members of the CotC to try to think of successful, externally funded parks that are not in a city's long-term planning (even if you can, one can come up with many more counterexamples; it is simply best practice and the norm. References available on request.). Being in the CP, as well as signing a

nonprofit partnership agreement, are foundational to successful, robust external fundraising. It shouldn't be a question of whether being outside a plan prevents anything, it should be whether being in a plan enables or helps anything. Being in the CP would help enable fundraising.

Third, once again it was stated that the city has no money. I do not think it should be necessary to provide to the CotC a list of the discretionary things the city (or DDA) has spent general budget funds on in the past few years. Given the small amounts at stake, there is no question the city and DDA could afford to better support this project. It is a matter of will and priorities. A2 is not Detroit. And in other cities not as strapped as Detroit, public monies are used. The issue is not that A2 doesn't have money, it is that they don't want to spend it on this despite Prop A expressing the will of the people. Nor do they seem to want to let the DDA know this is an important project for the downtown. I would urge all members of the CotC to refrain from repeating this false talking point. The city and DDA have plenty of money to support this if they chose to, and the CotC, of all groups, I would think, should be recommending that.

Fourth and last, while it is great that the Library Green Conservancy (LGC) is donating \$70K to the RFP, given that the CotC now has a robust and wonderful plan in front of it, I am wondering why the full \$110K is being spent on an RFP, only the first step on the long road of obtaining and constructing a "fancy" design, rather than using that money to invest in the things needed to make the current recommendations work: umbrellas or the equivalent, tables, chairs, lights, signage, storage, etc. (I recognize this could require City Council to change the appropriation and the LGC to get donors' approval; those are not insurmountable hurdles). That, combined with removing parking to enable casual as well as event use, would completely change the way people think about and use the Library Lot, and it could be done in much less than a year. And THEN, once it is clear the city will add the entire Commons to its CP, once an agreement is under way with a nonprofit to manage volunteers and fundraising, and once the space is active and vibrant, then it will be so much easier to go out and get corporate and other financial support. In other words, the terrific activation ideas already on the table can be prioritized with current money; an RFP leading to a design leading to major physical changes can be further down the road. It would be easier to raise funds for the RFP and subsequent construction and, in the meantime, the public would get to enjoy the Library Lot. Construction, let alone the RFP and a final design, could take years. I think citizens would applaud your pragmatism and appreciate being able to use an activated space much sooner.

So there are questions of false or misleading narratives, facts, and strategy. What I am suggesting is recommending measures that would have the city act as a best practice partner, which creates a virtuous circle that then helps the private sector raise the funds to make this work. Without that partnership, the entire endeavor is hamstrung. And I should note that the initial ideas I am suggesting would cost the city nothing: putting it in the CP and signing an agreement with a nonprofit partner. Even if City Council and the LGC cannot or will not alter the terms of their appropriations and donations, at least those two steps would help. And, if the 110K can be repurposed to implementing the current plan, A2 would enjoy an activated space much sooner while future fundraising would be strengthened.

I hope you will give my suggestions serious consideration. Thank you for your service to the community.

Kind regards,

Daniel Rubenstein